

**N THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
COLUMBIA DIVISION**

MARLIN WILLIAMSON,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Case No. 1:14-cv-0101
)	Judge Haynes / Knowles
JOHN BAXTER, WENDY ASHE, ROBERT)	
COBLE, CHRISTIAN BERRY, KAREN)	
ORTON, and TERESA PETTY,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

I. Introduction and Background

This matter is before the Court upon Defendant John Baxter's Motion to Dismiss pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6). Docket No. 51. In support of his Motion, Defendant has contemporaneously filed a Memorandum of Law. Docket No. 52.

Plaintiff has not responded to the instant Motion.

Plaintiff, who at all times relevant to the case at bar was an inmate housed at the South Central Correctional Center ("SCCC"), filed this pro se, in forma pauperis action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1983, alleging that Defendants violated his Eighth Amendment rights. Docket No. 1. In the "Factual Allegations" section of his Complaint, Plaintiff states, "Plaintiff is bringing this Complaint against the Defendants alleging Deliberate Indifference and/or imminent danger, against Defendants Wendy Ashe, Robert Coble, Berry, Orton and Perry." *Id.*, p. 4. While Plaintiff does not mention Defendant Baxter in that paragraph of his Complaint, Plaintiff names Mr. Baxter as a Defendant in the style of the case, and Plaintiff avers:

4. Defendant, John Baxter, is the Appointed Medical Director for Corrections Corporation of America (hereinafter “CCA”) a private corporation that is contracted to house and care for state inmates of the State of Tennessee. Defendant hold office [*sic*] at Corrections Corporation of America Headquarters 10 Burton Hill Blvd. Nashville Tennessee 37215. Defendant is being sued in it [*sic*] individual and official capacity, at all times mentioned herein.

...

20. Plaintiff alleges that Defendant John Baxter, as Corporation Headquarters Medical Director, he come responsible for employing Professional Medical Staff that adequately conduct their duties in making sure inmates receive proper and adequate medical care.

Defendant Baxter, is employing Medical Personnel that save money for the Corporation at the risk of human life. Corrections Corporation of America is a profit for [*sic*] Corporation. The Medical Staff Operation under Defendant Baxter leadership, has one goal, that Corporation profit, not prisoner health [*sic*].

Id., ¶¶ 4, 20.

Plaintiff seeks declaratory and injunctive relief, compensatory and punitive damages, and costs, as well as “any additional relief this Court deems just, proper and equitable.” *Id.*, p. 8.

For the reasons set forth below, the undersigned recommends that Defendant Baxter’s Motion to Dismiss (Docket No. 51) be GRANTED.

II. Law and Analysis

A. Standard of Review: Motion to Dismiss

Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) provides that a claim may be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. In order to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, a complaint must contain either direct or inferential allegations respecting all material elements to sustain a recovery under some viable legal theory. *Mezibov v. Allen*, 411 F.3d 712,

716 (6th Cir. 2005). Conclusory allegations or legal conclusions masquerading as factual allegations will not suffice. *Id.* A complaint containing a statement of facts that merely creates a suspicion of a legally cognizable right of action is insufficient. *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 127 S.Ct. 1955, 1965 (2007). The “[f]actual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level”; they must “state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* At 1965, 1974. *See also, Ass’n of Cleveland Fire Fighters v. City of Cleveland*, 502 F.3d 545, 548 (6th Cir. 2007).

Moreover, the United States Supreme Court has recently addressed the appropriate standard that must be applied in considering a Motion to Dismiss for failure to state a claim. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 137 L. Ed. 2d 868 (2009). The *Iqbal* Court stated in part as follows:

Two working principles underlie our decision in *Twombly*. First, the tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions. Threadbare recitals of the elements of the cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice Rule 8 marks a notable and generous departure from the hyper-technical, code-pleading regime of a prior error, but it does not unlock the doors of discovery for plaintiff armed with nothing more than conclusions. Second, only a complaint that states a plausible claim for relief survives a motion to dismiss Determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim for relief will, as the Court of Appeals observed, be a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense. . . . But where the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged - but it has not “show[n]” - “that the pleader is entitled to relief.”

129 S.Ct. at 1949-1950, 173 L. Ed. 2d at 884 (citations omitted).

B. 42 U.S.C. § 1983

1. Generally

As has been noted, Plaintiff claims that Defendants were deliberately indifferent to his serious medical needs in violation of his Eighth Amendment rights pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

See Docket No. 1. Section 1983 provides, in part, that:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress...

Thus, in order to state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States, and must show that the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48, 108 S. Ct. 2250, 2254-55 (1988), *citing Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527, 535, 101 S. Ct. 1908, 1913, 68 L. Ed. 2d 420 (1981) (overruled in part on other grounds, *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 330-331, 106 S. Ct. 662, 88 L. Ed. 2d 662 (1986)); *Flagg Bros., Inc. v. Brooks*, 436 U.S. 149, 155, 98 S. Ct. 1729, 1733, 56 L. Ed. 2d 185 (1978). The traditional definition of acting under color of state law requires that the defendant in a § 1983 action have exercised power “possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because the wrongdoer is clothed with the authority of state law.” *Id.* at 49, 108 S. Ct. 2255, *quoting United States v. Classic*, 313 U.S. 299, 326, 61 S. Ct. 1031, 1043, 85 L. Ed. 1368 (1941).

2. Individual Capacity Claims

42 U.S.C. § 1983 does not permit the imposition of liability based upon *respondeat superior*. *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325, 102 S. Ct. 445, 454, 70 L. Ed. 2d 509 (1981). *See also, Monell v. Dep’t of Soc. Serv.*, 436 U.S. 658, 694, 98 S. Ct. 2018, 2037, 56 L. Ed. 2d 611 (1978); *Street v. Corrections Corp. of America*, 102 F.3d 810, 818 (6th Cir. 1996).

In order for Defendant Baxter to be held liable in his individual capacity, Plaintiff must demonstrate that Defendant Baxter personally condoned, encouraged, or participated in the conduct that allegedly violated his rights. *Birrell v. Brown*, 867 F.2d 956, 959 (6th Cir. 1989) (citations omitted). *See also, Bellamy v. Bradley*, 729 F.2d 416, 421 (6th Cir. 1984) (*citing Hays v. Jefferson County*, 668 F. 2d 869, 872-874 (6th Cir. 1982) (The supervisor must have “at least implicitly authorized, approved or knowingly acquiesced in” the misconduct.) Conclusory allegations are not enough. *See Street*, 886 F.2d at 1479. *See also, Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 257; *Nix v. O’Malley*, 160 F.3d 343, 347 (6th Cir. 1998); *Lujan v. National Wildlife Fed’n*, 497 U.S. 871, 888, 110 S. Ct. 3177, 3188, 111 L. Ed. 2d 695 (1990); *McDonald v. Union Camp Corp.*, 898 F.2d 1155, 1162 (6th Cir. 1990). Plaintiff must establish a “causal connection between the misconduct complained of and the official sued.” *Dunn v. State of Tennessee*, 697 F.2d 121, 128 (6th Cir. 1982).

3. Official Capacity Claims

In complaints alleging federal civil rights violations under § 1983, “[a]n official capacity claim filed against a public employee is equivalent to a lawsuit directed against the public entity which that agent represents.” *Claybrook v. Birchwell*, 199 F.3d 350, 355 n.4 (6th Cir. 2000) (*citing Kentucky v. Graham*, 473 U.S. 159, 165, 105 S. Ct. 3099, 3105, 87 L. Ed. 2d 114 (1985)). *See also, Frost v. Hawkins County Bd. of Educ.*, 851 F.2d 822, 827 (6th Cir. 1988). As such,

when a public employee is sued in his or her official capacity, the claims are essentially made against the public entity. *Id.*

4. Eighth Amendment

a. Generally

The Eighth Amendment provides that:

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

U.S. Const. amend. VIII.

The United States Supreme Court has held that the constitutional prohibition of “cruel and unusual punishments” forbids punishments that are incompatible with “the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society,” or which “involve the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain.” *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 102-03, 97 S. Ct. 285, 290, 50 L. Ed. 2d 251 (1976) (citations omitted).

In order to establish an Eighth Amendment claim, an inmate must satisfy a two-prong test: (1) the deprivation alleged must be objectively serious; and (2) the official responsible for the deprivation must have exhibited deliberate indifference to the inmate’s health or safety. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834, 114 S. Ct. 1970, 1977, 128 L. Ed. 2d 811 (1994).

b. Deliberate Indifference To Serious Medical Needs

The State has a constitutional obligation, under the Eighth Amendment, to provide adequate medical care to those whom it has incarcerated. *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104, 97 S. Ct. at 291.

“[D]eliberate indifference to serious medical needs of prisoners constitutes the

‘unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain’ proscribed by the Eighth Amendment.” *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104. This is true “whether the indifference is manifested by prison doctors in their response to the prisoner’s needs or by prison guards in intentionally denying or delaying access to medical care or intentionally interfering with the treatment once prescribed.” *Id.* at 104-05.

Not every prisoner’s allegation of inadequate medical treatment, however, is a violation of the Eighth Amendment. *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 105. For instance, courts have held that the accidental, inadvertent, or negligent failure to provide adequate medical care does not state such a claim. *Id.* at 105-06 (citations omitted).

Pursuant to Supreme Court precedent, the Sixth Circuit held, in *Hunt v. Reynolds*, that Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference claims must contain both an objective component, “that [plaintiff’s] medical needs were sufficiently serious,” and a subjective component, “that the defendant state officials were deliberately indifferent to the plaintiff’s needs.” 974 F.2d 734, 735 (6th Cir. 1992) (citations omitted).

In order to satisfy the objective requirement, the Supreme Court requires that an inmate demonstrate evidence of a current harm or evidence of a medical complaint or condition of confinement that “is sure or very likely to cause serious illness and needless suffering.” *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. 25, 33, 113 S. Ct. 2475, 2480, 125 L. Ed. 2d 22 (1993). Under the Eighth Amendment, inmate plaintiffs, must allege, at the very least, unnecessary pain or suffering resulting from prison officials’ deliberate indifference. *Id.* (prisoner alleging that he suffered pain and mental anguish from delay in medical care states a valid Eighth Amendment claim).

As for the subjective element, the Sixth Circuit has held that “a determination of deliberate indifference does not require proof of intent to harm.” *Weeks v. Chaboudy*, 984 F.2d 185, 187

(6th Cir. 1993). There must, however, be a showing of deliberate indifference to an inmate's serious medical needs. *Molton v. City of Cleveland*, 839 F.2d 240, 243 (6th Cir. 1988) (*citing Westlake v. Lucas*, 537 F. 2d 857, 860 n. 3 (6th Cir. 1976)). In fact, “[k]nowledge of the asserted serious needs or of circumstances clearly indicating the existence of such needs, is essential to a finding of deliberate indifference.” *Horn v. Madison County Fiscal Court*, 22 F.3d 653, 660 (6th Cir. 1994) (citations omitted). The inquiry, therefore, according to the Sixth Circuit, is “[w]as this individual prison official aware of the risk to the inmate's health and deliberately indifferent to it?” *Thaddeus-X*, 175 F.3d at 402 (*citing Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 837, 844, 114 S. Ct. 1970, 1979, 1982-83, 128 L. Ed. 2d 811 (1994)).

C. The Case at Bar

As discussed above, in order to state a cognizable § 1983 claim against Defendant Baxter in his individual capacity, Plaintiff must show that Defendant Baxter had some direct, personal involvement in the alleged constitutional deprivation. *See, e.g., Knott v. Sullivan*, 481 F.3d 561, 574 (6th Cir. 2005). As can be seen, Plaintiff has failed to do so; Plaintiff does not even allege that Defendant Baxter personally deprived him of medical care or was deliberately indifferent to his serious medical needs. Absent such allegations, Plaintiff cannot sustain his individual capacity claims against him.

With regard to Plaintiff's official capacity claim against Defendant Baxter, as noted, “[a]n official capacity claim filed against a public employee is equivalent to a lawsuit directed against the public entity which that agent represents.” *Claybrook*, 199 F.3d 355 n.4; *Frost*, 851 F.2d at 827. Defendant Baxter, as “Corporation Headquarters Medical Director,” stands in the shoes of his employer, CCA. CCA is a private corporation that contracts with the State to operate the

penal facility. A private entity that contracts with the State to perform a traditional state function, such as operating a penal facility, acts under color of state law and may be sued under § 1983. *Hicks v. Frey*, 992 F.2d 1450, 1458 (6th Cir. 1993); *Street v. Corrections Corp. of America*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Thus, CCA is amenable to suit under § 1983.

In order for CCA to be held liable, Plaintiff must plead allegations, *inter alia*, that an “official policy or custom was adopted by the official makers of policy with ‘deliberate indifference’ towards the constitutional rights of persons affected by the policy or custom.” *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378, 387-88, 109 S. Ct. 1197, 1204, 103 L. Ed. 2d 41 (1989). *See also, Monell v. Dept. of Soc. Serv.*, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91, 98 S. Ct. 2018, 2037, 56 L. Ed. 2d 611 (1978) (In order to find a governmental entity liable, Plaintiff must establish that (1) he / she suffered a deprivation of a constitutionally protected interest, and (2) the deprivation was caused by an official policy, custom, or usage of the local governmental entity.).

Plaintiff in the case at bar fails to minimally contend that any official CCA policy or custom caused the alleged deprivation of his rights. Accordingly, Plaintiff cannot sustain his official capacity claim against Defendant Baxter.

III. Conclusion

For the reasons discussed above, the undersigned recommends that Defendant Baxter’s Motion to Dismiss (Docket No. 51) be GRANTED, that Plaintiff’s claims against Defendant Baxter be DISMISSED, and that Defendant Baxter be TERMINATED as a Defendant in this action.

Under Rule 72(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, any party has fourteen (14) days after service of this Report and Recommendation in which to file any written objections to this

Recommendation with the District Court. Any party opposing said objections shall have fourteen (14) days after service of any objections filed to this Report in which to file any response to said objections. Failure to file specific objections within fourteen (14) days of service of this Report and Recommendation can constitute a waiver of further appeal of this Recommendation. *See Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 106 S.Ct. 466, 88 L. Ed. 2d 435 (1985), *reh'g denied*, 474 U.S. 1111 (1986); 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72.



E. CLIFTON KNOWLES
United States Magistrate Judge